

Dear Colleagues:

Today, on behalf of all of us at the FAA, I sent a letter to Sean O'Keefe, Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), expressing deepest sympathies to all our colleagues at NASA on the loss of the Columbia shuttle and crew.

FAA employees know the feelings of devastation in the wake of national aviation tragedies. This tragedy, too, hit close to home. Harry Heflin, manager of the financial services division in our Central Region is the brother-in-law of shuttle mission flight surgeon Laurel Blair Salton Clark. For NASA, as well as Harry's family, the devastation is all the greater because those who were lost were members of the larger NASA family -- colleagues, relatives, and friends.

Steve Wallace, director of the FAA's Office of Accident Investigation, is serving on the Columbia Accident Investigation Board, and I am proud to say that FAA employees -- from Air Traffic Services, Commercial Space Transportation, Regulation & Certification, and our Washington Operations Center -- pitched in over the weekend to help in a variety of other ways.

For decades, the FAA and NASA have worked closely on research to improve aviation safety and to push back the boundaries of the unknown in air and space. And, now in this time of their particular need, certainly the FAA continues to stand ready to help in any way we can.

Our thoughts and prayers go especially to the families of friends of the seven brave astronauts who lost their lives to help extend the frontiers of knowledge and make life better for all of us.

Marion C. Blakey